

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
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NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR MOPS IS SY LE

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN LEBANON

1. SUMMARY. HABIB INFORMED DINITZ LEBANESE HAD TOLD US THAT WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN FORCES TO AYSHIYAH COULD BE COMPLETED BY FEBRUARY 14 AND THAT ELEMENTS TO BE SUBSTITUTED WOULD BE AUTHENTIC LEBANESE UNITS. HABIB CONVEYED LEBANESE REQUEST THAT ISRAEL URGE CHRISTIANS NOT TO ATTACK THESE LEBANESE UNITS AND THAT ISRAEL, IF IT HAD TO MAKE ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT ABOUT WITHDRAWAL, LIMIT ITSELF TO SAYING A REDEPLOYMENT OF THE ADF WAS UNDERWAY WHICH MET ISRAELI CONCERNS. HABIB INDICATED WE COULD REASONABLY EXPECT NOTHING MORE BEFORE SECRETARY'S TRIP, AND REITERATED IN STRONGEST TERMS OUR REQUEST THAT ISRAEL
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RESTRAIN PUBLICITY. END SUMMARY.

2. UNDER SECRETARY HABIB FEBRUARY 10 GAVE FOLLOWING STATEMENT TO AMBASSADOR DINITZ. BEGIN TEXT.

A. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAS NOW GIVEN US THE TIMETABLE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF THE SYRIAN FORCES TO AYSHIYAH. FOREIGN

MINISTER BOUTROS INFORMED OUR CHARGE AT ABOUT NOON TODAY (FEBRUARY 10) THAT THE WITHDRAWAL COULD BE COMPLETED BY 0800 LOCAL TIME, FEBRUARY 14.

B. OUR CHARGE CONVEYED AT THE SAME TIME THE ISRAELI REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE THAT LEBANESE ELEMENTS SUBSTITUTED FOR THE SYRIANS WOULD BE GENUINE AND AUTHENTIC LEBANESE UNITS. FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS ASSURED US THAT THIS WOULD BE THE CASE.

C. THE FOREIGN MINISTER ASKED THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT BE REQUESTED TO USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON (BY WHICH WE ASSUME HE MEANT THE CHRISTIAN GROUPS) NOT TO ATTACK THE LEBANESE FORCES THAT WILL BE SENT IN TO REPLACE THE SYRIANS. THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, HE SAID, WOULD TRY TO PREVENT PROVOCATIVE ACTIONS FROM OCCURRING, BUT ASKED ISRAELI ASSISTANCE IN CALMING THE SITUATION IN THE AREA.

D. FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS THEN RAISED WITH US THE HARM WHICH COULD BE CAUSED BY CONTINUED ISRAELI PUBLICITY. HE SAID THE NEWS REPORTS EMANATING FROM ISRAEL WERE PUTTING SARKIS IN AN EXTREMELY DELICATE POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE LEBANESE PEOPLE AND OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WOULD PREFER NOT TO ISSUE ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT ABOUT THE WITHDRAWAL, HE SAID, BUT MIGHT BE FORCED TO DO SO IF THE ISRAELI PUBLICITY PERSISTED.

E. HE SUGGESTED THAT IF IT IS NECESSARY TO SAY ANYTHING,
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THE ISRAELIS LIMIT THEMSELVES TO SAYING PUBLICLY THAT A REDEPLOYMENT OF THE ARAB SECURITY FORCE WAS UNDERWAY WHICH MET ISRAELI CONCERNS.

F. WE BELIEVE THAT, WITH THIS PROMPT WITHDRAWAL TO AYSHIYAH, THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE A SERIOUS EFFORT TO MEET IMMEDIATE ISRAELI CONCERNS WITHIN THE POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS IT FACES, AND THAT WE CAN REASONABLY EXPECT NOTHING MORE PENDING SECRETARY VANCE'S TRIP TO THE AREA.

G. WITH RESPECT TO PUBLICITY, WE WANT TO REITERATE IN THE STRONGEST TERMS OUR REQUEST THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT ACT WITH GREAT RESTRAINT. WE HAVE BEEN SURPRISED, IN THE

LIGHT OF THE VIEWS WE HAVE EXPRESSED TO YOU ON THIS SUBJECT, TO NOTE THE NEWS REPORTS OUT OF JERUSALEM YESTERDAY MAKING PUBLIC ASPECTS OF OUR EXCHANGES WHICH WE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED WOULD BE HANDLED WITH MORE DISCRETION. WE

REFER IN PARTICULAR TO AN ARTICLE OF FEBRUARY 9 IN THE JERUSALEM POST ON THE SUBJECT, QUOTING "WELL-INFORMED POLITICAL SOURCES" IN JERUSALEM. THESE SOURCES "INDICATE THAT A FACE-SAVING PULLBACK BY SYRIAN TROOPS FROM THE SOUTHERN LEBANESE TOWN WAS NOW BEING FORMULATED QUIETLY BY THE U.S." IT IS ALL TOO CLEAR THE DAMAGING EFFECTS THAT SUCH PUBLICITY COULD HAVE ON THE CAREFUL EFFORTS THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN MAKING, AND COULD WELL AFFECT OUR ABILITY TO CONTINUE IN OUR ROLE AND OUR CREDIBILITY WITH THE LEBANESE AND SYRIANS. END TEXT.

3. HABIB SAID LEBANESE HAD GOOD POINT ABOUT PUBLICITY AND ASKED THAT ISRAEL MAKE SPECIAL EFFORT TO CURB IT. HE ALSO ASKED THAT ISRAEL PASS WORD TO CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON NOT TO GET NERVOUS, NOTING THIS WOULD BE FIRST TIME CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WOULD BE TRYING TO INSERT ITS OWN FORCE IN AREA, AND IF IT SUCCEEDED, IT WOULD BE IN EVERY-
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ONE'S INTEREST.

4. DINITZ FULLY AGREED SUCCESS OF EFFORT WOULD BE IN ISRAEL'S INTEREST. HE WAS CERTAIN ISRAEL WOULD BE ABLE TO PASS WORD TO CHRISTIANS BUT WAS NOT SURE HOW EFFECTIVE IT WOULD BE. AS FOR PUBLICITY, DINITZ STRESSED ISRAELI EMBASSY HAD NOT BEEN SOURCE OF WASHINGTON POST STORY FEBRUARY 10 ON DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO ARRANGE SYRIAN REDEPLOYMENT. DINITZ AGREED THAT LEBANESE HAD SUGGESTED SENSIBLE FORMULA FOR WHAT ISRAEL MIGHT SAY PUBLICLY.

5. ATHERTON SUGGESTED ISRAELIS WAIT TO USE LEBANESE FORMULA UNTIL AFTER REDEPLOYMENT HAD TAKEN PLACE. DINITZ SAW ADVANTAGES IN ITS USE BEFOREHAND, NOTABLY THAT IT WOULD HALT PRESS SPECULATION IN ISRAEL. OTHERWISE, THERE WOULD BE FOUR MORE DAYS OF SPECULATION. IF GOL COULD LIVE WITH IT, DINITZ THOUGHT GOI SHOULD ANNOUNCE IT EVENING OF FEBRUARY 11. ATHERTON SUGGESTED WAITING UNTIL AFTER FEBRUARY 13 ISRAELI CABINET MEETING AND UNDERLINED IT WOULD BE REALLY DAMAGING IF GEOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF REDEPLOYMENT LEAKED BEFOREHAND.

6. ANSWERING DINITZ, HABIB CONFIRMED LEBANESE RESPONSE MEANT ALL SYRIAN FORCES IN KFAR TIBNIT WOULD BE REDEPLOYED TO AYSHIYAH.
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